

Committee: SPECPOL 1 Committee

Topic: The question of the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Summary

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a complex and prolonged crisis driven by ethnic tensions, control over natural resources and political instability. It began in the mid-1990s following the Rwandan Genocide, when militias, some backed by neighboring countries, fought for control over certain territories and resources. Despite various peace agreements, violence persists today, leading to humanitarian crises, displacement and widespread suffering, especially in the eastern DRC.

Background Information

In October 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that the number of internally displaced people within the DRC had climbed to nearly 7 million, primarily due to conflict, the highest number recorded yet. Most were concentrated in the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, and Tanganyika (International Organization for Migration). Within the DRC, 25.4 million people are food insecure, including 13.2 million children. Recently, there has been a rapid spread of the deadly mpox virus, with 90% of cases reported in the DRC. The virus has been declared a public health emergency by the World Health Organization (WHO). Combined with regular outbreaks of violent conflict, the DRC is currently facing one of the worst humanitarian and food insecurity crises in the world (Save the Children).

The conflict can be traced back 30 years ago to a subset of Hutu refugees organizing militias and planning attacks on Rwanda from refugee camps within the DRC. During the First and Second Congo Wars, Uganda, Rwanda, and Angola invaded the DRC to target these Hutu militias. Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia also became involved in the war. Even after the war ended with a ceasefire agreement, violent conflict continued, and more rebel groups emerged. The conflict is fuelled by the DRC's vast natural resources. Rebel groups like M23 and militias

continue to fight for dominance in the eastern regions, which are rich in minerals. Rwanda is accused of intervening and supporting M23. The DRC has failed to eliminate Hutu rebel groups within the country, leading Rwanda to accuse the DRC of harbouring groups they see as a direct security threat, particularly the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Despite repeated ceasefire agreements and UN peacekeeping efforts, violent conflict has persisted. Under weak central governance and widespread corruption, over 120 armed groups continue to operate within the DRC's borders. Continuous violence has led to mass displacement, creating a humanitarian crisis. The lack of stability makes it difficult for the DRC to escape the cycle of violence, displacement, and poverty. The effectiveness of UN peace missions is still debated, and in 2023, President Tshisekedi requested MONUSCO's withdrawal.

The question of the Democratic Republic of Congo remains one of the most complex issues in the world. Addressing it requires a combination of political reform, regional diplomacy, and international support for peacekeeping and development. Both short-term measures to reduce violence and long-term strategies for sustainable peace and prosperity must be considered.

Definition of Key Terms

Internally displaced people – People or groups who have been forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or disasters, but have not crossed an international border (United Nations Economic and Social Council).

Mpox – Mpox is a viral illness caused by the monkeypox virus. It spreads mainly through close contact between people but can also be transmitted from surfaces or objects touched by someone with mpox. In areas where the virus is present in wild animals, it can also spread from infected animals to people who come into contact with them (World Health Organization).

Militia – “a private group of armed individuals that operates as a paramilitary force and is typically motivated by a political or religious ideology” (Merriam-Webster).

Peacekeeping – “the preserving of peace, especially: international enforcement and supervision of a truce between hostile states or communities” (Merriam-Webster).

Transitional government – A temporary administration that helps a country navigate political change by overseeing the shift to a stable government, organizing elections, enacting reforms, and maintaining order.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Rwanda – The DRC shares a border with Rwanda to the east. Rwanda and the DRC currently have very high tensions and there is great potential of escalation into widespread armed conflict. Reports by the United Nations and various human rights organisations detail evidence that Rwanda has been providing support to the M23 rebels that have fuelled a massive humanitarian crisis in the DRC. However, Rwanda officially denies these allegations. Similarly, Rwanda accuses the DRC of providing the FDLR with direct support.

China – China is closely involved with both the DRC's economy and inner conflict. Chinese companies control most of the foreign-owned cobalt, uranium, and copper mines in the DRC. This virtual monopoly of China in the DRC's mining industry has resulted in a lack of access to DRC's vital resources for other countries and Congolese people. It has also resulted in the Congolese army being deployed several times in eastern Congo to protect Chinese mining interests. Meanwhile, China has also supplied the DRC government with drones and weaponry to fight M23 rebels and supplied Uganda with arms for military operations within the DRC (Council on Foreign Relations).

United Nations – The UN has had direct involvement with the DRC on several occasions, including through peacekeeping missions such as MONUSCO and intervention brigades like the one in 2013.

East African Community (EAC) – The EAC is an intergovernmental organisation consisting of eight member states: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and the DRC. It aims to foster political, economic, and social cooperation among its members. The DRC joined the EAC in 2022 and they continue to work collaboratively to address security concerns and strengthen political and economic ties. In 2022, the East African Community Regional Force (EACRF) was deployed in eastern Congo to support stabilisation and peacekeeping efforts (East African Community).

International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) – This is an inter-governmental body formed to address the significant regional challenges in the African Great

Lakes area due to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and ongoing instability in the DRC. It was founded in 2000 following United Nations Security Council resolutions and comprises of twelve member states, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia. Its aims include fostering sustainable peace and development through regional cooperation (International Conference on the Great Lakes Region).

Timeline of Events

1885: The Berlin Conference is concluded and the Congo is given to King Leopold II of Belgium as his personal property. The Congo Free State is recognized by other countries under King Leopold II's rulership.

1908: Following international outcry due to atrocities committed by King Leopold II during his rule, Belgium takes over rulership of the Congo.

1960: Following a western-backed coup (mostly U.S. and Belgium), the Congo becomes independent and Mobutu Sese Sekou begins a dictatorship.

1971: Mobutu Sese Seko renames the country to the Republic of Zaire.

1994: Rwandan Genocide. An estimated one million minority ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda were killed by ethnic Hutu extremists. This led to nearly two million Hutu refugees fleeing to eastern Zaire, including a subset of Hutu extremists. They began organizing militias within Zaire, using refugee camps as bases to increase their attacks on Rwanda. This includes the FDLR.

1996: In response to the Hutu militias, the Rwandan government organizes a rebellion led by Laurent Desire Kabila to attack them and overthrow the Mobutu regime. The rebellion is known as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, or AFDL. It allies with a regional coalition including Angola, Uganda, and Zimbabwe that is anti-Mobutu. The First Congo War begins.

1997: Mobutu's national army is defeated. Mobutu flees the country and Kabila takes over power, ending Mobutu's rule and winning the First Congo War. Kabila is sworn in as president and renames the country back to The Democratic Republic of Congo.

1998: Kabila expels all foreign soldiers from the Congo and the AFDL alliance ends. Hutu rebel attacks continue into Rwanda. In response, Rwanda invades the Congo, supported by Congolese Tutsis and other oppositions of Kabila in the DRC army. The Second Congo War begins.

1999: The six main countries involved in the war, the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia, agree to the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement due to a stalemate. However, the agreement is not fully implemented and fighting continues.

2000: MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) is established to monitor the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement.

2001: Laurent Kabila is assassinated. His son, Joseph Kabila, replaces him.

2002 July: DRC and Rwanda sign the Pretoria Agreement in South Africa, helping end the Second Congo War.

2002 December: All major domestic rebel groups sign a power-sharing agreement with the DRC government.

2003: A transition government and parliament has been established to lead until elections take place. As this government takes over power, the Second Congo War officially ends. However, there remains violence in eastern Kivu and Ituri regions and breakaway groups from the RCD and Mai Mai militias keep fighting.

2006: In the first free election in four decades in the DRC, Joseph Kabila is declared winner and formally inaugurated as president.

2007: A major outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus takes place in the Congo.

2008 October: The major army base of Rumangabo is captured by rebel forces. Rwanda denies the claim of backing Tutsi rebel leader Laurent Nkunda.

2008 November: To help the strained UN peacekeeping effort in the east, the UN Security Council approves temporary increase of troops.

2009: In a joint Congolese-Rwandan offensive against rebel groups in the east, Nkunda flees across the border into Rwanda and is arrested and indicted for war crimes by the Congolese government.

2011: Joseph Kabila wins another term in presidential elections. The vote is criticized abroad to have contained widespread cheating and fraud. The result is also disputed by the opposition.

2012: In the east, a rebel group named the March 23 Movement (M23) made up primarily of ethnic Tutsis take the largest city in the region, Goma.

2013: Under the mandate of MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), the UN Security Council authorizes a rare offensive brigade, the UN Force Intervention Brigade, that supports the Congolese army in fighting against M23. This was effective and M23 begins negotiations to disarm and demobilize after admitting defeat.

2016: Joseph Kabila delays the presidential election until 2018. This sparks violent protests and sanctions by the U.S. and European Union (EU).

2019: Officials declare Félix Tshisekedi the winner of the presidential election. The first peaceful transfer of power since the DRC's independence takes place.

2021: Throughout 2021, violence in eastern Congo escalates. The DRC government decides to enforce martial law (temporary rule by military authorities) in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces.

2022: Remaining M23 rebels launch a new offensive in eastern Congo in March. The DRC seeks assistance from the East African Community (EAC) which forms a multinational force of about 12,000 troops which starts deploying in August. At the same time, the DRC had allowed the Ugandan military to enter its territory to pursue the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a militant group with ties to the self-declared Islamic State. The conflict leads to the displacement of over 100,000 people.

2022 July: The United Nations peacekeeping mission's failure to protect civilians sparks violent protests, resulting in the deaths of at least 36 demonstrators and five UN peacekeepers.

2022 November: Throughout 2022, The Rwandan government denies this accusation. Nearly 300,000 Congolese are displaced by this time. Leaders from Angola, Burundi, the DRC, and

Rwanda agree to a cease-fire in peace talks mediated by Kenya. M23 is not involved in these talks but agrees to this cease-fire, however, do not retreat from the areas they have captured. They accuse the DRC of supporting Hutu militias ("Council on Foreign Relations") ("Democratic Republic") (Payanzo et al.) (The Friends of the Congo).

2023 January: The Rwandan military fires on a Congolese fighter jet, claiming it entered Rwandan airspace. The DRC government says that this "amounts to an act of war." Meanwhile, M23 conquers more large parts in the North Kivu province and is heading towards its capital, Goma. By the end of January, the conflict has displaced over 450,000 people in eastern Congo (Agence France-Presse).

2023 September: President Tshisekedi asks the United Nations peacekeeping force of around 17,000 people to leave a year early in December, accusing the peacekeeping force of being unable to reduce the conflict in the eastern Congo (Council on Foreign Relations).

2023 October: According to the International Migration Organization (IOM), nearly 6.9 million people are internally displaced in the DRC, a record high. Over 80% of these people live in the east (International Migration Organization). With increasing tensions and Rwanda's military presence in eastern Congo and along their shared border, UN Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region Xia Huang warns that tensions between the DRC and Rwanda could lead to an open military confrontation.

2023 November: DRC and Rwanda agree to a pact brokered by the US that includes a promise of a 72-hour ceasefire. This is ineffective as ongoing, lethal violence is not reduced.

2023 December: The UN Security Council votes to renew MONUSCO's mandate for another year. EAC troops complete withdrawal from the DRC after only one year.

2024: The UN peacekeeping mission begins its withdrawal from the DRC. Throughout the year, the DRC faces increasing attacks from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and regular conflict between M23, Rwandan troops, Congolese forces, and other militias. This results in a growing displaced population in urgent need of humanitarian aid.

2024 July: There is a 4 week humanitarian truce between Rwanda and the DRC proposed by the US. This leads to a decrease in fighting.

2024 July 30: Rwanda and the DRC sign an agreement to a ceasefire beginning on the 4th of August, mediated by Angola.

2024 August: M23 violates the ceasefire agreement by continuing their advancing and capturing of towns. They capture Ishasha in North Kivu, DRC ("Ceasefire Agreement") (Ilunga).

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

This mission was established by the Security Council to organize the monitoring of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, the separation of forces and to maintain communication with all parties involved in the Ceasefire Agreement ("Helping Bring")

Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo

(Pretoria Agreement) An agreement in 2002 establishing a power-sharing transitional government to lay the groundwork for elections and institutional reforms in the DRC ("Global and Inclusive").

2005 ICJ Ruling on Uganda On 19 December 2005, the ICJ ruled that Uganda breached human rights laws due to the brutalities committed by its military and violated international law by occupying parts of eastern DRC ("Uganda Violated").

MUNOSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo) In accordance with Security Council resolution 1925 of 28 May, MONUSCO took over MONUC on 1 July 2010. MONUSCO's mandate relates to supporting the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts and the protection of humanitarian personnel, human rights defenders and civilians facing imminent threat of physical violence. MONUSCO has been authorized to use all necessary means to fulfil this mandate ("MONUSCO Fact Sheet").

UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service) Support of MUNOSCO UNMAS began supporting MUNOSCO on 1 January 2016 in achieving its mandate (United Nations Mine Action Service).

Sanction Regimes by UN Security Council resolutions The DRC has been subject to various UN Security Council resolutions imposing sanction regimes, including arms embargoes and travel bans, to curb the activities of armed groups. Recently, resolutions such as 2641

(2022) and 2688 (2023) have extended these sanctions while modifying certain requirements ("Security Council Renews") ("UN Documents for").

For a list of relevant UN documents and resolutions, see

<https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

The Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (1999)

This ceasefire agreement was signed by the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and various rebel groups in attempt to end the Second Congo War. The agreement called for a ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign troops, and the disarmament of militias. MONUC was established to oversee its implementation. Some foreign troops withdrew; however, the agreement was not fully implemented as it failed to address some of the deep-rooted causes of the complex issue. Despite the security interests of Uganda and Rwanda being protected through the agreement, rebel groups in Uganda and Rwanda kept on fighting over Kisangani over political control and control over the diamond, gold and coffee concessions in the area. This led to continued instability and ongoing fighting in eastern Congo ("Ceasefire Agreement") (International Crisis Group).

Pretoria Agreement (2002)

This ceasefire agreement was made between the DRC and Rwanda and helped end the Second Congo War. Rwanda agreed to withdraw its troops from the DRC in exchange for the DRC's commitment to disarm and repatriate the FDLR and other armed groups. Rwanda withdrew some forces but the disarmament of the militias was incomplete, leading to continued instability in eastern Congo and ongoing tensions between Rwanda and the DRC. The International Crisis Group criticized in a 2003 article, "MONUC's mandate and the Pretoria Accord of July 2002 have treated disarmament strictly as a security and Congolese issue... the internal Rwandan political dimension... has not received serious attention." The article elaborates that there was a complete lack of "genuine political contacts with the FDLR, the group that is supposed to disarm" and no international actor recognized the need for "greater political openness and reconciliation in Rwanda" in order for the disarmament process with the FDLR to succeed.

The agreement also established a transitional government in the DRC that included representatives from all major factions to lead the country to democratic elections. This faced challenges but successfully led to the first multiparty elections in the DRC in 2006. The Second Congo War officially ended when this transitional government took over power on 18 July 2003 ("Global and Inclusive") (International Crisis Group) ("Peace Agreement").

Sun City Agreement (2003)

This agreement came as a result of the Inter-Congolese dialogue from 2001-2003 initiated under the Lusaka agreement. This peace-making process involved the main armed conflict parties, unarmed political parties, and civil society. The Sun City Agreement was seen as the final step to this dialogue and initially led to a decrease in fighting, but several breaches of the agreement were reported. It was ineffective in fully stopping the conflict ("Inter-Congolese Negotiations").

MUNOSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo)

MUNOSCO has had mixed success within the DRC, achieving successes while also facing significant challenges. The mission has failed to control armed groups in the DRC's eastern provinces, Ituri and North and South Kivu, where armed groups continue to threaten regional instability and kill civilians ("A New Approach"). However, through diplomacy and collaboration with local and regional peace-making efforts, MONUSCO allowed for the continued unity of the DRC. Their efforts allowed for sustained international attention on the region, prevented a large-scale conflict like the previous Congo wars, supported human rights awareness, promoted civilian protection mechanisms, and documented rights violations to establish accountability.

A notable success is in the UN Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in 2013. Malawian, Tanzanian, and South African troops mandated to conduct offensive operations defeated the M23 and assisted with some of their integration into the Congolese military. However, it was less successful against the ADF and FDLR, instead transitioning into a mission that left much of the fighting to Congolese government forces.

Local communities continue to distrust the mission, perceiving the forces as part of the issue as the result of anti-MONUSCO disinformation campaigns and the government exploiting

community discontent to discredit MONUSCO and galvanize political support. This has led to President Tshisekedi demanding their withdrawal (Nantulya).

The Nairobi Declarations (2013)

This agreement was signed as a result of the Kampala Dialogue, talks aimed at disarming and demobilizing the M23 and ensuring accountability for violations of human rights. The agreement was criticized for lack of precision and failure to comprehensively address key issues including amnesty, reintegration, the return of refugees, political reforms, and the unresolved role of neighbouring states. The agreement failed to put an end to the conflict ("Ban Welcomes") ("Making Sense").

The Peace, Security, and Cooperation (PSC) Framework (2013)

This framework aimed to address the conflict's root causes by establishing guidelines for involvement at national, regional, and international levels. On a national level, this includes reforming the security sector, promoting decentralization, and reinforcing state authority within the DRC. On a regional level, the framework stresses respect for state sovereignty, enhancing cooperation, and ensuring justice, including prosecuting war crimes. Internationally, it calls for sustained involvement and a reassessment of MONUSCO's role. The framework also advocates for oversight mechanisms to track the progress of these commitments. The framework faced challenges during implementation, resulting in persisting violence and instability ("Implementation of the Peace") ("Peace, Security").

The Nairobi Process (2022)

This is a recent ongoing peace process led by the EAC. The main objective is facilitating the EAC's Peace and Security agenda by engaging local armed groups to address peace and security challenges in the DRC, with a strong focus on armed groups. The Nairobi Process calls for an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign troops, the disarmament, demobilisation and stabilization of local armed groups and the deployment of a regional force in eastern DRC to take action against those who resist disarmament. While the Nairobi Process has deployed troops from Kenya, Burundi, and South Sudan, the situation remains unstable and M23 has not fully followed through on its promises to withdraw from key areas.

One limitation to the success of the EAC is their controversial forces, particularly the inclusion of Rwandan officers. The DRC was publicly opposed to this involvement due to Rwanda's

suspected support for M23. This has caused both local communities and DRC politicians to question the legitimacy of the EAC and the Nairobi Process (Hoinathy).

Luanda Process (2022)

These peace talks are currently still ongoing and focus on addressing the DRC-Rwanda political relationships and tensions, recalling elements of the 2013 PSC framework that was not implemented. It takes a much more diplomatic approach at addressing the conflict than the Nairobi Process but has similarly faced challenges in implementation. Previous summits from this peace process endorsed the decisions made from the Nairobi process (Hoinathy).

International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)

The ICGLR has developed several frameworks outlining methods for conflict prevention and resolution in the DRC in the past, such as the Pact on Security, Stability, and Development in the Great Lakes Region adopted in 2006 and entered into force in 2008. The implementation of such frameworks has faced challenges including a lack in commitment of member states, financial limitation and complexities from overlapping memberships in international organizations (Halidu and Ellah) (International Conference on the Great Lakes Region).

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Governance and Rule of Law through Institutional Reforms

Weak governance and rule of law have been significant barriers to stability in the DRC. Corruption, ineffective institutions, and a lack of accountability have created significant challenges in the implementation of previous peace agreements and the continuation of peacebuilding efforts while also fuelling conflict. Comprehensive reforms aimed at strengthening governmental institutions focusing on enhancing transparency, accountability, and efficiency can significantly contribute to the likelihood of successful conflict mediation.

Enhancing Resource Management and Regulation

The DRC's natural resources such as minerals and timber have fuelled conflict due to mismanagement and exploitation. Regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms can be enhanced to prevent illegal resource exploitation and smuggling. In the process, involving local

communities in resource management decisions can ensure that they benefit from resource wealth.

Diplomatic Engagement and Dialogue to Address DRC-Rwandan Political Tensions

Political tensions between the DRC and Rwanda have exacerbated conflict and instability in the region. These tensions must be addressed through diplomacy for long-term peace. This includes controlled and mediated discussions addressing the concerns and desires of each party, sorting out differences and targeting the root causes of the conflict.

Inclusive Peace Processes

Past peace processes in the DRC have often failed to include all relevant stakeholders, resulting in incomplete and unsustainable agreements. Inclusive peace processes that address the root causes of the conflict are of great importance.

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